

Local retailers need to up their game

 By [Dave Nemeth](#)

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Thursday, 20 August, saw the grand opening of one of the world's oldest toy shops, Hamleys, right here in Gauteng at the Greenstone Mall, Edenvale...

"Hamleys is the oldest toy shop in the world and one of the world's best-known retailers of toys. Founded by William Hamley as 'Noah's Ark' in High Holborn, London, in 1760, it moved to Regent Street in 1881." - [Wikipedia](#)



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News of this immediately caught my attention for a variety of reasons; firstly, recent articles of mine about the decline of various large retailers have been met with a slew of comments about the economy that is to blame. Secondly, I have never really grown up and any trip to London will find me planning a trip to the Regent Street store for the remarkable experience that allows me to forget all adult thinking and simply immerse myself in an amazing fantasy land.

The big question was whether they would be able to pull off this amazing experience here in good old South Africa. Most local retail is far from creating great window displays, never mind great in-store experiences. We are currently seeing some legendary brands and large retail groups, who were at the top of their game for years, failing dismally. Many have sadly woken up too late and have already closed their doors. Currently, there is a host of international brands entering the South African retail landscape and doing great things, the disruption they are creating is not being countered in any way by the local brands. With that being said, there are a handful that are pulling out all the stops and really trying to create a new level of retail.

The Hamleys opening experience began with a parade led by its famous Ringmaster, accompanied by a marching band and every single comic character you can think of. From Spiderman and Sleeping Beauty through to Darth Vader and Chewbacca. The costumes were far from cheap and nasty, with every detail having been meticulously thought through. The parade was greeted at the entrance to the store by hundreds (if not well over 1,000) of cheering fans both young and old. It is important to note that this was a weekday afternoon so they had clearly got their pre-marketing correct, to attract such a great crowd.

Visual feast

The size of the store is a fraction of the size of the Regent Street monstrosity, which I believe is perfectly suited to a mall environment, as well as if they are looking to expand their footprint successfully. The interior is exceptionally well laid out and an absolute visual feast, without being cluttered and looking like a Chinese bazaar. The props are great and include large cranes, through to large Lego masterpieces. There are in-store displays and interaction all the way through the store just like its international counterparts. The quality of merchandise was fantastic with many big brands, but certainly something for everyone and I didn't find the pricing at all excessive.

There is no doubt in my mind that Hamleys is going to grow and is destined to become the largest toy chain in Africa, that is, of course, if it can keep doing exactly what I saw at this opening.

But what does this mean for its competitors and other local retailers? I am afraid the answer is simple: catch up or die! As harsh as that sounds, it is without a doubt the truth. There is a host of international brands looking at entering this market, using this as a springboard into the rest of Africa. If local retail is to stand the slightest chance of succeeding against these up-to-date traders, it will have to change its thinking and adopt new measures urgently that will create outstanding experiences through every single touch point. From apps, online buying and brick-and-mortar stores, the dynamics will

need a huge overhaul, not to mention service levels and the proper training of staff.

With that being said, well done to Hamleys - it is exciting time for retailers who apply forward thinking and are prepared to change the dynamics of merchandise trading.

ABOUT DAVE NEMETH

A leading blue chip international company recently identified Dave as one of the top creative influencers in the country. Dave Nemeth is a qualified designer who has held a variety of senior as well as executive positions with some of the countries leading retail groups, spanning a career of twenty years. Email Dave at daven@worldonline.co.za, follow @davenemeth on Twitter and connect on Facebook.

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